CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A method of operating an autostainer device, said method comprising the steps of:

accepting a slide tray, said slide tray having at least one specimen slide and a reagent pack associated with said specimen slide, said reagent pack comprising a first identifier that specifies a particular slide preparation protocol;

reading said first identifier from said reagent pack; and

preparing said specimen slide according to said particular slide preparation protocol.

2. The method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said reagent pack is associated with said specimen slide by being adjacent to said specimen slide.

3. The method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said reagent pack is associated with said specimen slide by having a second identifier on said specimen slide that is the same as said first identifier.

4. The method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said reagent pack comprises a set of wells, each well containing a reagent needed for said particular slide preparation protocol.

5. The method as claimed in claim 1 wherein said reagent pack comprises a peel-off identifier, said peel-off identifier for placement on said specimen slide.

6. A method of operating an autostainer device, said method comprising the steps of:

accepting a slide tray, said slide tray having at least one specimen slide and a reagent pack associated with said specimen slide, said specimen slide comprising a first identifier that specifies a particular slide preparation protocol for said specimen slide;

reading said first identifier; and

preparing said specimen slide according to said particular slide preparation protocol.

7. The method as claimed in claim 6 wherein said reagent pack is associated with said specimen slide by being adjacent to said specimen slide.

8. The method as claimed in claim 6 wherein said reagent pack is associated with said specimen slide by having a second identifier that is the same as said first identifier.

9. The method as claimed in claim 6 wherein said reagent pack comprises a set of wells, each well containing a reagent needed for said particular slide preparation protocol.

10. The method as claimed in claim 6 wherein said reagent pack comprises a peel-off identifier containing said first identifier, said peel-off identifier for placement on said specimen slide.

11. An apparatus for staining specimen slides, said apparatus comprising:

more than one slide tray, said slide tray for holding more than one specimen slide;

an automatic staining head assembly, said automatic staining head assembly for depositing reagents on said specimen slides, said automatic staining head assembly further comprising an input device for reading identifiers that specify slide preparation protocols to perform;

a control system, said control system coupled to said automatic staining head assembly for controlling said automatic staining head assembly to prepare said specimen slides during a staining run;

a pause input, said pause input for pausing said apparatus during said staining run; and

a restart input, said restart input for restarting said apparatus after adding new specimen slides onto on of said slide trays;

wherein said control system causes said automatic staining head assembly to read a new set of identifiers associated with said new specimen slides to add said new specimen slides to said staining run.

12. The apparatus as claimed in claim 11 wherein said apparatus further comprises reagent packs.

13. The apparatus as claimed in claim 12 wherein each said reagent pack comprises a set of wells, each well containing a reagent needed for said particular slide preparation protocol.

14. The apparatus as claimed in claim 12 wherein said identifiers comprise a barcode on each said reagent pack.

15. The apparatus as claimed in claim 11 wherein said identifiers comprise a set of barcodes on said specimen slides.

16. The apparatus as claimed in claim 11 further comprising:

a STAT restart input, said STAT restart input for restarting said apparatus after adding new specimen slides onto on of said slide trays wherein said new specimen slides are given high priority;

17. A slide rack for a slide staining apparatus, said slide rack comprising:

a first receptacle for accepting a specimen slide; and

a second receptacle for accepting a reagent pack, said reagent pack containing at least one reagent needed to prepare said specimen slide.

18. The slide rack as claimed in claim 17 further wherein said reagent pack further comprises an identifier that identifies a slide preparation protocol for said specimen slide.

19. The slide rack as claimed in claim 17 further wherein said first receptacle and said second receptacle are adjacent to each other.

20. A reagent pack for a slide staining apparatus, said reagent pack comprising:

a set of wells, said well containing reagents for a specific slide preparation protocol; and

an identifier, said identifier associated with said slide preparation protocol.

21. The reagent pack as claimed in claim 20 wherein said identifier comprises a peel-off sticker for placement on an associated specimen slide.

22. The reagent pack as claimed in claim 20 further wherein said identifier comprises a peel-off sticker for placement on an associated specimen slide.

23. A slide staining apparatus, said apparatus comprising:

at least one slide rack for holding a slide specimen to be prepared; and

a tiltable sink assembly, said tiltable sink assembly having a first drain hole on a first side such that liquid material drains through said first drain hole when tilted down on said first side, said tiltable sink assembly having a second drain hole on a second side such that liquid material drains through said second drain hole when tilted down on said second side.

24. The apparatus as claimed in claim 23 wherein said first drain hole is coupled to a sewage system.

25. The apparatus as claimed in claim 23 wherein said second drain hole is coupled to a hazardous waste container.

26. The apparatus as claimed in claim 23 wherein said second drain hole is coupled to a corrugated tube.

27. An apparatus for staining specimen slides, said apparatus comprising:

at least one slide tray, said slide tray for holding at least one specimen slide and an associated reagent pack, said associated reagent pack having reagents needed for processing said specimen slide; and

an automatic staining head assembly, said automatic staining head assembly for obtaining said reagents from said associated reagent pack and depositing reagents on said specimen slide.